The Planning Inspectorate

Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 6 January 2023

by Gary Deane BSc (Hons) DipTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 2nd February 2023

Appeal Ref: APP/D3125/D/22/3303096
The Nordibank, Road Through Lidstone, Lidstone, Chipping Norton OX7 4HL

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 against a refusal to grant planning permission.
- The appeal is made by Mr James Moore against the decision of West Oxfordshire District Council.
- The application Ref 21/03994/HHD, dated 13 December 2021, was refused by notice dated 13 June 2022.
- The development proposed is to replace thatch roof with slates.

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main issue

2. The main issue is the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the host building and the local area.

Reasons

3. The Nordibank is a detached 2-storey dwelling with stone walls and a thatch roof. It occupies a prominent position on steeply sloping ground among a small group of buildings to one side to the road that passes through the rural settlement of Lidstone.

4. The appeal building has been extended and externally altered, as the appellant points out. Among these changes are new windows, a steel flue alongside the gable wall facing the road and a single storey extension with a dual pitched slate roof at the back of the main building. Even so, the appeal dwelling still retains considerable charm, and it has several attractive features that contribute to its traditional character and complement the rural setting of the site. While not a listed building, the age of the property, its simple linear form, modest pattern of fenestration, and its construction largely from traditional materials, including thatch, are all part of its special interest and qualities.

5. These features can be experienced and appreciated from various public vantage points along the adjacent road. In views from this highway, The Nordibank has a distinguished presence in the local street scene. With no other obvious examples of properties with large thatch roofs that are visible from the road in the vicinity of the site, The Nordibank is also locally distinctive. To my mind, the appeal property makes a significant and positive contribution to the character and appearance of the local area.

6. The proposal is to replace the thatched roof of the main house and a porch with slates. Where necessary, the walls of the dwelling would be extended upwards to the eaves using matching stone.

7. Policy EH12 of the West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031 (LP) deals with traditional buildings. It states that proposals involving the conversion, extension or alteration of such buildings will not normally be permitted if this would extensively alter the existing structure or remove features of interest or include extensions or alterations that would obscure or compromise the form or character of the original building.

8. The introduction of slate, as proposed, would be consistent with the roofing material that is predominantly used on properties elsewhere in Lidstone. From the adjacent road, the finished dwelling would also be seen among a cluster of buildings that have slate roofs including the extension to the rear of the appeal dwelling. However, the proposal would still result in the loss of a traditional roofing material and remove a highly conspicuous feature that in my view is a defining characteristic of the existing building. That most of cottages and houses in the vicinity of the site have slate roofs, with no other obvious examples of thatch, would also mean that The Nordibank is far less likely to be regarded as locally distinctive if the appeal scheme were to proceed.

9. The introduction of a new hard dark material with crisp edges in place of the visually softer and deeper thatch would fundamentally alter the appearance of the host building. Sharper roof lines would result across the front and rear of the building with the varied ridge and eaves levels more pronounced than the thatch. The visual effect would be to subdivide the main roof into three clearly separate sections rather than achieve the cohesion provided by thatch, which subdues the variations in roof profile and enables the dwelling to be read as a single entity. The deep thatch overhangs to the eaves and 'wrap arounds' to the top of the first-floor windows, which appear to be features of the original property, would also be lost.

10. For these reasons, the proposal would remove a key feature of interest from the appeal dwelling that would extensively alter its appearance and unduly compromise its traditional character and qualities. In doing so, the positive contribution of The Nordibank to the character and appearance of the local area would be significantly diminished. That impression would be most evident on the immediate approach to the site from the south.

11. It is true that the West Oxfordshire Design Guide 2016 (DG) notes that two traditional roofing materials dominate in West Oxfordshire: natural limestone slate and Welsh Blue slate. However, it also recognises that thatch is a highly important and locally characteristic roof type albeit most prevalent in the Thames Vale.

12. The site does not fall within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty or a conservation area. I also note that the Council regards the existing building to be a non-designated heritage asset (NDHA) although few details have been provided to support this conclusion over and above it being considered as a traditional building. For the reasons given, I consider that the existing building is of sufficient value to be of local significance although it does not necessarily follow that a property must therefore be regarded as a NHDA. The appellant has contested the Council's opinion and has provided convincing evidence that

the appeal property should not be regarded as a NDHA. On balance, I share the appellant's position.

13. I recognise that buildings have to evolve with alterations made to reflect the changing needs and circumstances of users. Historic and current photographs have been provided of an example in Lidstone where thatch has been replaced with slate. However, that process of change does not in itself justify inappropriate development. If anything, it adds greater significance to the thatch roofs that are in place and remain unaltered because the type of roofing material is made even rarer as a result.

14. It may be, as the appellant states, that the Council has previously found the use of slates as a roofing material acceptable on the extension at the back of the appeal property. However, the rear addition is smaller and less conspicuous in the street scene than the main dwelling and so the visual impact of its roofing material would be far less than the proposal. In any event, each development should be assessed on its own merits.

15. On the main issue, I conclude that the proposed development would cause significant harm to the character and appearance of the host building and the local area even if it were not a NDHA. As such, it conflicts with LP Policies OS2, OS4, H6, EH9 and EH12 of the West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031 (LP) and the DG. These policies and guidance note that development should conserve and enhance the built and historic environment; demonstrate high quality design; respect the character of the surrounding area; and avoid alterations to traditional buildings that compromise their character.

Conclusion

16. The proposed development would conflict with the development plan, as a whole. There are no material considerations, including the Framework, which indicate that the decision should be taken otherwise than in accordance with the development plan. Accordingly, the appeal should be dismissed.

Gary Deane

INSPECTOR